

DV Podcast #3, “Fraud and the DV”
December 2009
Questions and Answers

Introduction

We are speaking with two consular officers from the U.S. Consulate General in Lagos about fraud and the Diversity Visa program. At the end of our session, they have also promised to provide some suggestions for the DV interview.

Q1: What would you say are the key messages of this third podcast about the DV program?

A: Let me start by saying that the DV program is one we value highly since it contributes to the diversity of those immigrants who receive permanent resident status in the U.S. Unfortunately, the DV program in Nigeria has suffered from tremendous amounts of fraud, which I'll separate into two types. The first type is fraud committed by so-called agents trying to take advantage of unsuspecting applicants. The second type is fraud committed by applicants themselves, who sometimes have help from agents or other people.

When I use the word “agent” I’m referring to those unauthorized individuals in Nigeria who offer to submit the online entry or otherwise assist applicants with the DV process. I want to emphasize that these people have no affiliation with the U.S. Consulate General or the U.S. Department of State. The U.S. government has no employees who operate outside of the Consulate building as part of the DV program and does not endorse any agents for this purpose.

We have two key messages for DV applicants today. One, we want applicants to know that you should not commit fraud as part of your Diversity Visa application. If you do commit fraud, you will not receive a visa. You may be permanently ineligible to receive *any* kind of visa to the U.S. And, depending on the nature of the fraud, you may go to jail in Nigeria.

Two, do NOT listen to anyone who says you must do something dishonest or illegal to qualify for the visa. Instead, you should go to www.dvlottery.state.gov to read for yourself everything that you need to know about the DV program.

Q2: What are some of the allegations that you have heard about fraud that is committed by agents and touts against Nigerian DV applicants?

A: We have heard of several different types of fraud. The first, and perhaps most common, is that an agent who enters the lottery for the applicant will use his own address when he submits the entry online. Then, if the applicant wins, the DV packet is sent to this person’s own address rather than to the applicant’s. When this happens, the person won’t release the packet unless the applicant pays him a significant amount of money.

Sometimes, it is not the agent who holds the packet, but a post office employee. Workers at the post office will notice the winning packets coming through the mail. Instead of delivering a

packet as they should, the post office worker will demand a large sum for the packet to be released to the applicant.

Both of these acts are crimes of extortion under Nigerian law.

Sometimes, instead of demanding money, someone calling himself an agent or a post office employee will demand that the applicant marry someone else. This could be a friend or relative of the person holding the packet, or someone who has paid him money.

Now, it is fine to have an agent submit your online entry, but you should know that you are responsible for making sure that your entry is complete and accurate. If someone is forcing you to commit fraud or is holding your packet hostage and demanding a large sum of money, you should contact the Nigerian police for assistance. You should also email the Consulate at LagosIV@state.gov to let us know about your predicament.

Q3: Interesting. You say that we should not be forced into marriages that are not legitimate. However, my friend told me that someone advised her that the U.S. Consulate doesn't like single DV applicants and prefers that they be married, so that the Consulate can collect more application fees. Is this true?

A: No, absolutely not. If you look at our website, www.dvlottery.state.gov, you will see that there is no marital requirement for the DV program. The U.S. government has no preference as to whether an applicant is married or single. The only thing we care about is that any relationship is legitimate.

Q4: My friend also was told that she had to pay money in advance of her appointment, in order to gain favorable consideration with the Consulate. Should she pay?

A: No, definitely not. Let me stress that there are NO fees that you must pay as part of the DV program until you physically enter the Consulate building on the day of your interview. Anyone who says otherwise is trying to steal your money.

Q5: You have spoken about fraud that has been perpetrated by people in Nigeria against DV applicants. On the other hand, what kind of fraud do DV applicants engage in at the Consulate?

A: We see three primary types of DV fraud at the Consulate.

One, we see fraudulent civil documents. For example, an applicant may submit a fake birth certificate or a fake marriage certificate.

Two, we see applicants fraudulently representing their educational or occupational qualifications. Some applicants bring in fake WAEC or NECO certificates. Other applicants bring a real certificate but for exams that they themselves did not sit. In all of these cases, the applicant will be refused a visa.

Finally, we see fraudulent relationships. In these cases, applicants (or an agent on their behalf), has added to their applications a spouse or child that is not legitimately theirs. Many applicants bring in such fake spouses or children. If someone asks you to do this, say no. All those who commit these types of fraud are refused visas.

Q6: What are the penalties for applicants who commit fraud at the Consulate?

If you misrepresent your educational qualifications or add a spouse or child who is not yours, you will NOT receive a diversity visa. You will lose ALL of the application fees that you have submitted, which are non-refundable. There is more. You also may receive a lifetime ban preventing you from ever entering the United States or securing a U.S. visa of any kind. Finally, you may be put in Nigerian jail or face other criminal penalties from the Nigerian police.

Please, do NOT listen to people who tell you that it will be ok to submit WAEC or NECO scores that are not yours, or to add a spouse or child that is not yours. It simply won't work.

Do NOT listen to people who promise you that they can teach you how to fool your way through the interview to get your visa. It won't work. Remember, these people, who have no affiliation with the Consulate, are only interested in taking your money.

Q7: What should I do again if I am pressured to commit fraud of any kind as part of the DV application?

A: If you believe you are being pressured to provide false information as part of your DV application, we urge you to let us know and to report the incident to the police. We cannot help you if you don't report it, so please write to us at LagosIV@state.gov.

Q8: You have said a lot today about fraud and the DV program and how applicants should not commit fraud. How about some suggestions for applicants about the interview at the Consulate?

A: Sure. One suggestion would be that applicants with spouses or children should come to the interview with pictures of them and their family. All applicants also should be prepared to discuss their educational or occupational qualifications.

When answering questions, applicants should be honest and complete in their answers. To give one example, while we mentioned that it is ok for someone else to complete your online entry, you need to be honest if an officer asks you if anyone, such as an agent, helped complete your entry or application forms.

One other—important—suggestion, and it's a simple one, but please, if you do not hear or understand a question that is asked, do NOT answer it. Instead, ask the officer to repeat the question or say that you do not understand. Or, if you do not know the answer to a question, just say that you do not know. Many applicants get themselves into trouble by answering incorrectly to a question that they either didn't know the answer to or that they didn't hear properly.